



USDA Launches Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative

WASHINGTON, Nov. 15, 2021 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture today announced the formation of the [USDA Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative](#) to promote traditional food ways, Indian Country food and agriculture markets, and Indigenous health through foods tailored to American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) dietary needs. The initiative is the latest in a series of bold, historic USDA actions to build equitable systems and programming.

“Historically many USDA programs were not initially designed to support Indigenous foods or Indigenous ecological and agricultural knowledge,” said Heather Dawn Thompson, Director of USDA’s Office of Tribal Relations. “The Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative is a response to tribal nation priorities and an opportunity to reimagine federal food and agriculture programs from an Indigenous perspective.”

Agencies across USDA will participate in this multifaceted initiative, with special leadership from the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), which recently announced [\\$3.5 million in funding](#) to support tribal organization self-governance in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). FNS Deputy Under Secretary Stacy Dean shared, “We are committed to reducing food insecurity while supporting Indigenous American agriculture.”

To kick off the Initiative, the Office of Tribal Relations (OTR) is partnering with several tribal-serving organizations to develop projects that raise awareness of Indigenous perspectives about food and agriculture and inform future USDA programs and policies. Projects will explore issues such as marketing Indigenous-produced foods, supporting seed saving centers, and transitioning to bison production. The individual projects are:

1. The creation of two regional Indigenous seed processing centers (Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance - Indigenous Seed Keepers Network).
2. A video series on wild food foraging and sustainable gathering practices (Linda Black Elk & Lisa Iron Cloud).
3. Recipes and cooking videos for wild and Indigenous foods (North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems – Chef Sean Sherman of the Sioux Chef team).
4. A manual to help interested Native producers transition from cattle to bison (Intertribal Buffalo Council).
5. Staff to expand domestic marketing opportunities for Native producers (Intertribal Agriculture Council).
6. Purchasing of Indigenous and Native produced foods for educational promotion opportunities by OTR and FNS (Intertribal Agriculture Council).
7. A report on legislative and regulatory proposals needed to empower tribal self-governance within USDA food programs (University of Arkansas - Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative).

In addition, USDA is creating an online searchable database of USDA food sovereignty resources, programs, and contacts. Learn more about the USDA Food Sovereignty Initiative at www.usda.gov/tribalrelations.

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